

CBS MEMORANDUM

FROM: Irv Drasnin
TO: MR. LEONARD
DATE: May 1, 1975

Perry Wolff has just informed me that you have decided that Dan Rather should narrate "The Guns of Autumn."

There is an old Chinese proverb: to tell you what you want to hear is to be servile, to tell you what I think is to be loyal. I hope that, in my fifteenth year at CBS NEWS, I have earned the right to express my views without being considered either disloyal or self-serving.

Dan Rather is a highly respected journalist, and deservedly so. His integrity is unquestioned. It is possible, and seems reasonable to expect, that all our integrities will be questioned in the aftermath of this broadcast.

During my many weeks on location filming this broadcast and in my careful study of the literature and resource material, it is clear that we are dealing with a particularly sensitive and vocal special interest -- the hunting and gun lobby -- that is extremely hostile to the television networks. I encountered this hostility everywhere I went. It seems reasonable to expect an attempt to discredit this broadcast, and network journalism, as soon as they've seen it. The precedents are numerous.

If a broadcast such as "The Guns of Autumn" were narrated by someone who hadn't been there and who had no first-hand knowledge of the events being reported, then it is possible we would be giving them the opening they need and we would be putting ourselves in a position that is hard to defend.

It may not always be appropriate for the producer-reporter to narrate a news documentary, but I believe this is a case in which it is. One analogy that comes to mind is David Lowe Sr.'s "Murder and the Right to Bear Arms."

If you feel strongly about Dan's presence, perhaps there is a middle ground in which he might introduce, close and read bridges around the narrative.

From a journalistic standpoint, and in fairness to Dan, I urge further consideration of how this film should be narrated.

